

## **Vayetzei: Haftorah Yaakov and Yisrael. by Rav Joseph Dov Soloveitchik zt"l**

- The Haftorah for Vayetze which begins with Jacob's flight and concludes with Teshuva. The secret of his message is the change between the use of Jacob and Israel. Jew dependent on non-Jewish world. Ramban, Yaakov implies weakness, Yisrael implies strength. Inner and spiritual strength from then till today.

VAYETZE:

Shiur HaRav Soloveichik ZT"L on Parshas Vayetzei transcribed by Dr. Israel Rivkin and Josh Rapps (Shiur date: 11/18/75)

The Haftorah for Parshas Vayetzei (Hosea 12:13) ranges over several different topics. It begins with Jacob fleeing and working as payment for his wife and continues with the prophet (Moshe) who led the Jewish Nation out of Egypt and then the prophet who led them into exile. The prophet rebukes them for their idol worship and its leading ultimately to the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash. The prophet concludes with the topic of Teshuva - Shuva Yisrael.

The Rav asked what is the message of the prophet, where is the continuity of the prophet especially through the various transitions among topics and what is its connection to Vayetzei?

The secret of the Haftorah is in the way the prophet changes between the use of the name Jacob and Israel. Why didn't the prophet use one of the names consistently throughout? The Rav explained: at birth, Esau was given his name because it connotes that he came out complete, the Hebrew word Assuy. This advanced state of development is symbolized by Esau's pushing to leave the womb first, showing Gevurah or strength, similar to the birth of Peretz who pushed ahead of his twin brother Zerach. The kings that descended from Judah came from Peretz as he showed inner strength that a king must have. On the other hand, Jacob was born holding on to the heel of Esau, which symbolized military and political dependence on Esau. The Jew, from the perspective of Yaakov, is dependent on the non-Jewish world. This can be seen today in the relationship between Israel and the USA. Esau spent his time in the field hunting and engaged in the constant battle of life which made him tough, strong and secure. Yaakov, on the other hand was a Yoshev Ohalim, he was not schooled in the lessons of life's battles, as he had a radically different external personae and mission from his brother.

Isaac wanted to give Esau the blessing of Hevey Gvir Lachecha because he had the best chance of physically carrying out. Yaakov agreed, saying that Esau is a hairy individual while he is smooth skinned. Yaakov was saying that he is not the kind to derive benefit from the physical blessings of Vyiten Lecha and Hevay Gvir Lachecha, which should go to someone who displays the attribute of Gevurah, strength. After he takes the blessings, Rivka discovers that Esau wants to kill Yaakov and wants Yaakov to run away to the house of Lavan. Rivka realizes that Yaakov is no match for the physical strength of Esau. Even though Isaac himself was never ordered to go to Aram Naharyim on his own to seek a wife, Yaakov has no choice in the matter; as the weaker of the brothers he is forced to flee.

The Ramban comments that the name Yaakov implies weakness while the name Yisrael implies strength. The Jew has tremendous inner strength with which he can stand up to an entire world. The prophet says "Yaakov ran away to Sdeh Aram And Yisrael worked on behalf of a wife": he is pointing out this contradiction, that on the one hand Yaakov ran away out of weakness while on the other hand the same person, as Yisrael, portrays great inner strength. Even though he was working as a slave for his uncle Lavan, he was still Yisrael who was ever vigilant and ready to fight to protect the tradition of Avraham and the Jewish Nation that would perpetuate that legacy.

When he faces Lavan after the latter caught up with him on his flight to return to Canaan, he stands up to him and protects his wives and children from Lavan's clutches and to preserve their identity as the children of Avraham and Yitzchak. The same weak Yaakov who was easy prey for Lavan to fool when it came to material and monetary considerations, was also the Yisrael who stood up to protect Bnay Yisrael with a resolute and strong spirit and defeated Lavan.

In Egypt, Bnay Yisrael were physically and economically weak, yet spiritually strong: they did not assimilate. As the Midrash says: Reuven and Shimon entered Egypt and the same Reuven and Shimon left Egypt, they did not assimilate. (The Rav noted that they did not assimilate in Egypt yet American Jews assimilate because they enjoy favorable economic conditions. They did not change their names, yet today American Rabbis use their secular names instead of their Jewish names.) As the prophet says: "And via a prophet, He raised the people out of Egypt". Even though we were physically weak and oppressed in Egypt, we still had the spiritual strength to produce prophets and leaders. We showed the same spiritual fortitude in Egypt that Yaakov showed years before when he stood up to Lavan.

Seventy two nations said that Israel should not exist; yet through the will of Hashem and our great spiritual strength, we have persevered and overcome great obstacles. The prophet also tells us U'bnavi Nishmar, that in the future Bnay Yisrael will continue to produce great leaders who will exhibit the great inner strength of Yisrael.

[Note: this shiur was given during the period when the UN resolution equating Zionism and racism. It is most interesting to read the following in light of the recent controversy that has erupted between Reform, Conservative and Orthodox Jews regarding the religious future of Eretz Yisrael.] The non-Jewish world might look at Zionism as racism if they look at laws like the Chok Hashevus, Law of Return. However if we show that Eretz Yisrael is a land of Kedusha, people can readily see that this is not the case. Eretz Yisrael is a viable concept and entity only if it is imbued with sanctity, Kedusha. Secular Zionism poses a great danger to Am Yisrael and Eretz Yisrael [because it seeks to deny this Kedusha]. The prophet says that we will maintain the inner strength of Yisrael and realize that idol worship is folly, hence the continuation of the prophecy is Shuva Yisrael, the return of the people to Hashem which is the ultimate exhibition of our inner strength. We can see the aspect of Yisrael among the non-religious Jews in America who risk their own security to protect Israel. The "Yisrael" potential dwells in each and every Jew. The Jew may be weak politically, economically or militarily.

Yet, the prophet has promised us that eventually this strength of Yisrael will burst forth, as the Jewish nation is destined to return to Hashem, Shuva Yisrael.

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Submitted by Nisson Shulman